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USC Nepal
A Workshop on Using Diversity Research Awards Research Project

15- 17 February 2006

Press Release

Nepal being an agrarian economy, agriculture remains the leading occupation of common Nepalese. The majority dependent on agriculture notwithstanding, the increase in chemical-intensive farming practices in recent years accelerated the fall in income leading to the decline of people's interests in farming. Indiscriminate exploitation of nature, the shrinking land and the excessive use of chemical fertilizer has triggered the depletion of soil fertility. This has taken heavy toll on biodiversity, food security and sustainable agriculture. In want of a meaningful national level research and studies, the problem currently staring in the face of the nation is how to convert agriculture into an opportunity for sustained income.

Though no concrete steps were taken at the national level, the USC Nepal took initiative to facilitate action research on how to develop and adopt sustainable farming methods; what are merits and demerits of organic *vis-à-vis* chemical intensive farming and how can biodiversity conservation and food security be achieved.

We, the Dalchowki Community Development Committee, Ghusel Community Development Committee, Dalit Welfare Organization, Mahila Upakar Manch, Majthar Community Development Women's Group, Agriculture Development and Conservation Group, and SEEDS Nepal, are deeply indebted to USC Nepal for involving and facilitating us in the 18 months long research on sustainable agriculture, food security and biodiversity with the objective of making agriculture a self-reliant occupation.

We set out to conduct the research by splitting ourselves into two groups – organic and chemical researching farmers. The farmers of either category – organic and chemical – engaged in research farming for 18 months gained empirical experience. We examined by means of the research the harms and benefits from either method of farming to our family, community and nation *plus* the loss and profit to the farmers accruing from either methods. The learning and experiences thus gathered through the research in Lalitpur, Banke, Sindhuli, Kaski, and Bara districts were put together in the workshop which provided us an opportunity to hold serious and extensive interactions and discussions over various issues. The ensuing discussions which lasted for 3 days based on research findings and experiences led us to arrive at

conclusion that there is no alternative to organic farming for sustainable agriculture.

Following the 3 days of extensive debate, discussions, and serious thoughts over biodiversity conservation, food security, and sustainable agriculture, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Chemical intensive farming may yield some short-term benefits; however it is detrimental to family, community and the nation in the long run. Biodiversity based ecological farming yields sustainable benefits.

2. Chemical intensive farming has caused extinction of local indigenous seeds whereas ecological farming has contributed to its protection and promotion

3. Chemical intensive farming has devastated biodiversity whereas ecological farming has conserved the biodiversity.

4. Chemical intensive farming has robbed soil of its fertility; ecological farming has enhanced fertility of soil.

5. Chemical intensive farming has worked to wreck and destabilize ecology; ecological farming, on the other hand, works to promote ecological health and systems.

6. Chemical intensive farming enables men's access to farming; ecological farming facilitates equal access of men and women to farming.

7. Chemical intensive farming promotes mono-cropping; ecological farming promotes mixed-cropping.

8. Chemical intensive farming has increased dependency; ecological farming has boosted self-reliance through conservation, development, and promotion of local and indigenous seeds.

9. Chemical intensive farming has caused serious health hazard to consumers; ecological farming has been health-friendly.

10. Chemical intensive farming is resource intensive and risk-prone; ecological farming is risk-free, easy and affordable.

11. Chemical intensive farming has rendered local farmers dependable on outsiders; ecological farming through mobilization of local resources has increased opportunity for self-employment and income-generation thus contributed to agriculture and economic development.

12. In chemical farming the farmers have to rely on outsiders for seeds, fertilizers and pesticides thus share the profit with outsiders; in ecological farming the farmers do not have this compulsion as they rely on local seeds and locally available resources.

Impact

- Ecological farming is biodiversity friendly; chemical intensive farming is biodiversity hostile
- Ecological farming contributes to the promotion of ecological balance; chemical farming works to upset that balance
- Ecological farming helps to conserve animal and plant species; chemical farming destroys them
- Ecological farming promotes self-reliance; chemical farming increases dependency
- Ecological farming generates awareness on conservation of seeds; chemical farming accelerates extinction of local seeds
- Ecological farming is conducive to IG activities like livestock and bee keeping; chemical farming spells disaster
- Ecological farming contributes to the overall development of sustainable agriculture and environment conservation; chemical farming does not.
- Ecological farming creates scope for the mobilization and utilization of local resources; chemical farming displaces them.
- Ecological farming is least resource intensive hence involves no threat of loan and interest; chemical farming does so.
- Ecological farming guarantees food rights; chemical farming does not.

Finally, we the farmers, on the strength of the research findings, learnings and experience have arrived at conclusion that for a sustainable and balanced agriculture method ecological farming is the only chief *mantra*. A failure to grapple with increased chemical farming done in the name of modern farming methods, and further delay in switching over to sustainable agriculture, would not merely cause decline in agriculture production and cause havoc to the traditional farming methods, but it

would also erode our food sovereignty and put us at the mercy of others. The unwise and mindless chemical farming practices indicate our increased dependency on others for food.

It is high time that the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Agriculture, National Planning Commission, and other concerned stakeholders, wake up and respond to the impending disaster by pursuing and promoting ecological farming for sustainable agriculture, food security, and biodiversity. There is the need to spread awareness about ecological farming across the wider spectrum of society and for the purpose activities like training, seminar and workshops must be conducted.

The research has underlined the need to launch massive awareness among the wider populace emphasizing the importance of ecological farming for food sovereignty and food security, and the role of mass media in launching advocacy in favor of ecological farming can not be overstated.